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NGT SHOOTS NOTICES TO 6 CRICKET STADIUMS FOR NON-COMPLIANCE

The National Green Tribunal has sent notices to six stadiums, including the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi for non-compliance of tribunal order

IN FOCUS: GROUNDWATER TO MAINTAIN STADIA

The plea was against use of groundwater or fresh water to maintain cricket grounds instead of the sewage treatment plant (STP)-treated water. And also against not installing rainwater harvesting systems. The NGT bench said seven stadiums failed to submit their replies despite repeated directions; only Hyderabad has sought time to reply

IPL MATCHES MAY GET AFFECTED

- Notices sent to Arun Jaitley Stadium, Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh Stadium (Raipur), Sawai Mansingh (Jaipur), Dr DY Patil Stadium (Mumbai), Ekana Stadium (Lucknow), Barabati Stadium (Cuttack)
- Lucknow, Delhi, Jaipur and Raipur are hosting matches this IPL season and NGT is asking why activity should not be stopped | P15

2021

YEAR OF ORDER, MANDATING STP-TREATED WATER & RAINWATER HARVESTING

CHENNAI ▪ MADURAI ▪ VIJAYAWADA ▪ BENGALURU ▪ KOCHI ▪ HYDERABAD ▪ VISAKHAPATNAM ▪ COIMBATORE ▪ KOZHIKODE ▪ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM ▪ BELAGAVI ▪ BHUBANESWAR ▪ SHIVAMOGGA ▪ MANGALURU ▪ TIRUPATI ▪ TIRUCHY ▪ TIRUNELVELI ▪ SAMBALPUR ▪ HUBBALLI ▪ DHARMAPURI ▪ KOTTAYAM ▪ KANNUR ▪ VILLUPURAM ▪ KOLLAM ▪ TADEPALLIGUDEM ▪ NAGAPATTINAM ▪ THRISSUR ▪ KALABURAGI

Trump's 'hell-hole' jibe on India 'in poor taste': Govt

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

IN a sharp response to US President Donald Trump's repost of a derogatory comment against India on social media, New Delhi on Thursday said that the comments are "uninformed, inappropriate and in poor taste".

MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said that the remarks do not reflect the reality of the India-US relationship, which has long been based on mutual respect and shared interests. "We have seen the comments, as also the subsequent statement issued by the US Embassy in response. The remarks are obviously uninformed, inappropriate and in poor taste," said Jaiswal.

Hours after Trump reposted American political commentator and radio host Michael Savage's podcast, the US went into a damage control. Responding to queries from Indian media, a US embassy spokesperson said: "The President has said 'India is a great country with a very good friend of mine at the top'."

DAY 55 | WAR WATCH

The podcast also termed Indian and Chinese immigrants as "gangsters with laptops" who have "stepped on our flag".

Trump shared the transcript and video of the podcast, calling for changes in the US' birthright citizenship law. "A baby here becomes an instant citizen, and then they bring in their entire family from China, or India, or some other hell-hole," it said.

The post drew sharp criticism from Opposition parties. "Modiji's dear friend... has shared a note abusing India and using an extremely disparaging term," said Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge.

'Shoot and kill' order

Trump on Thursday issued shoot-at-sight orders on Iranian boats laying mines to choke traffic through the Strait of Hormuz. "I have ordered the United States Navy to shoot and kill any boat, small boats though they may be... that is putting mines in the waters of the Strait," he said

Not safe to travel to Iran now: India

Indian embassy, Tehran cautioned against travelling to Iran in view of resumption of flights. "Airspace restrictions and operational uncertainties due to regional tensions continue to affect flight operations to and from Iran," it said

WITH THIS ISSUE CITY'S BEST WEEKEND GUIDE INDULGE 40 PAGES, INCLUDING 24 OF INDULGE (TABLOID)

Super massive polling again

TN sees unprecedented 85% turnout

T MURUGANANDHAM @ Chennai

Hundreds of voters wait in queue to cast their vote at a polling booth in Kallikuppam in Ambattur, Chennai, on Thursday | P JAWAHAR

THE high-stakes campaign of political parties for the Tamil Nadu Assembly poll received an equally enthusiastic response from the electorate on the day of polling as the state recorded an unprecedented 85.14% voter turnout on Thursday.

Though the sharp jump from 73.6% in 2021 Assembly polls is predominantly driven by the shrinking of the state's electorate by about 68 lakh from 6.41 crore to 5.73 crore due to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, the scenes at polling booths indicated palpable enthusiasm from voters, particularly from the youth, in participating in the democratic process.

The entry of actor C Joseph Vijay through his Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam has already raised the expectations on the surprises the election results may throw up on May 4, when the final results are expected to reveal whether these numbers will translate into substantial realignment of the political order in Tamil Nadu.

All districts registered above 75% voter turnout, and around 20 districts registered above 85%. Significantly, of the 234 Assembly constituencies, only seven recorded a voter turnout below 75%, while 42 have recorded voter turnout above 90%, indicating that the participation was widespread.

POLL WALL

While incumbent Chief Minister and DMK president M K Stalin is pitching his re-election as a battle for state autonomy against central overreach, AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami and the BJP were campaigning on the economic promise of a "double-engine government". Actor Vijay is riding on youth support to challenge the long-standing DMK-AIADMK duopoly.

The high turnout is usually read as a signal of people expecting change. In the 2011 Assembly elections, the state witnessed a high voter turnout of 78.29%. The incumbent DMK government lost, and the AIADMK came to power. However, there is a need for caution since 2016 witnessed a higher turnout of 74.8% than 73.6% in 2021, but the incumbent AIADMK retained power in 2016 and it lost power in 2021. MOREON:P7

Bengal voting highest since Independence

SUBHENDU MAITI @ Kolkata

WEST Bengal on Thursday recorded its highest-ever voting percentage since Independence at 91.78 for the first phase of assembly elections, 7.06% mere than the previous best of 84.72% in 2021. Voter enthusiasm was visible though the Election Commission of India's ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) axed 91 lakh names from the electoral rolls citing various reasons.

Murshidabad, Bankura, Cooch Behar, Malda, Jhargram and Paschim Medinipur reported turnout around or over 90%. Kalimpong was relatively lower around 81%.

What also stood out was the peaceful polling as no loss of life was reported, though stray incidents of violence were reported from a few districts. PM Narendra Modi congratulated the Election Commission for the peaceful polling. "For the first time in the last 50 years Bengal witnessed peaceful elections with less incidents of violence in the first phase" he said.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said the high turnout reflected "fear among people that if they don't vote, they may lose their voting rights and citizenship", linking it to SIR.

Polling was held in 152 of the total 294 seats in the state in the first phase. The second phase for the remaining 142 seats is scheduled for April 29. Women (92.69%) outnumbered men (90.92) at the polling booths, which made it more difficult to read the mandate. However, both the Mamata-led TMC and the BJP predicted a decisive mandate in their favour.

Violence erupted in Nawda in Murshidabad district after supporters of the TMC and Humayun Kabir's Aam Janata Unnayan Party clashed with each other, prompting the Central Armed Paramilitary Force to resort to lathi charge. Kabir, an expelled TMC leader, is a candidate there. In Kumarganj, BJP candidate Subrata Sarkar was assaulted by goons. Also, BJP MLA Agnimitra Paul's car was attacked near Rahmat Nagar in Asansol Dakshin.

PLEA IN HIGH COURT

2 IAS officers accused of seeking 15% cut in garbage tenders

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

ACCUSING two senior IAS officers of demanding 15% of the bid amount as commission, including 9% as illegal gratification to some people in the state government for awarding tenders for solid waste management packages, SN Balasubramaniam, general secretary of Bengaluru Mahanagara Swachata & Lorry Malikara Hagoo Guttigedarara Sangha, has filed a petition before the High Court of Karnataka seeking its directions to constitute a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to conduct a thorough investigation against the two officials.

The petition has been filed against Karee Gowda, chief executive officer, Bengaluru Solid Waste Management Ltd (BSWML), and Tushar Girinath, additional chief secretary, Urban Development Department.

When the matter was taken up for hearing by Justice Sachin Shankar Magadum on Thursday, counsel for the petitioner P Prasanna Kumar made the allegations against these officers.

However, advocate general K Shashikiran Shetty submitted that the allegations were false and both officers were honest. In fact, Karee Gowda was not in Bengaluru the day the petitioner claimed to have met him when he allegedly sought commission. Karee Gowda was in Delhi on some work, Shetty said, adding that the officer had a flight ticket to prove this.

However, the petitioner's counsel submitted that he would file an affidavit in support of his allegations so that the court can order an inquiry to know the truth. To file the affidavit, the court adjourned the matter to Friday. CONTINUED ON: P2

Bengaluru's Dhanush Sudhir Mysore celebrates with his family his perfect score of 625, on Thursday | KEVIN NASHON

SSLC results: Record pass percentage @ 94.1

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

KARNATAKA has recorded 94.1 pass percentage in the SSLC exam-1 (fresh or regular students), the highest-ever in history, as against 80.04 pass percentage in the previous academic year.

Dismissing speculations that the increase is due to reduction in pass marks for each subject from 35 to 30 and an aggregate percentage of 33, Minister for School Education and Literacy, Madhu Bangarappa pointed out that only 1,532 students have been benefitted by the reduction. He said, "A lot of people had criticised the department for reducing the pass marks. However, it has been able to help only a few thousand students and not in large numbers."

Around 8,66,045 students, including fresh candidates, private candidates, repeaters had registered for the exams and of which 8,56,516 students appeared and 7,60,002 students passed, recording an overall pass percentage of 88.73, as against 74.74% last year. CONTINUED ON: P5

TOP PERFORMING DISTRICTS

Dakshina Kannada **98.40%**

Udupi: **98.18%**

Uttara Kannada **98.09%**

Hassan: **97.51%**

DISTS WITH LESS PASS PERCENTAGE

Kalaburagi **85.06**

Madhugiri: **90.26**

Chikkaballapura **90.88**

Bengaluru South **91.65**

B'LURU PASS PERCENTAGE

Bengaluru North **95.33**

Bengaluru South **91.64**

Bengaluru Rural **95.33**

EXPRESS READ

Betting: HC stays order on FIR against Dr G, Tumakuru DC

Bengaluru: The Karnataka High Court on Thursday stayed the court order to the Kodigehalli police to register an FIR against Home Minister G Parameshwara and Tumakuru Deputy Commissioner Shubha Kalyan, for allegedly betting Rs 500 on a kabaddi match. The high court said the context in which the alleged offence is made out prima facie indicates mens rea | P4

Sexual assault: Kodagu DC revokes homestay licence

Madikeri: Following the arrest of two men over allegations of sexual assault on a US national in Kutta village near the Karnataka-Kerala border in Kodagu district, the government on Thursday revoked the licence of the homestay where the alleged incident occurred. The property is registered under P A Ponnappa and the licence was valid till 15 January 2029 | P6

35 peacocks die of heat in a week in Tumakuru

Tumakuru: At least 35 peacocks have died within a week in rural parts of Tumakuru and forest officials suspect extreme heat and dehydration to be the cause of the deaths. Officials also ruled out any foul play such as poisoning, as no such substances were found during autopsy. The deputy conservator of forests has ordered an inquiry into the death of the birds | P6

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